

"The Circle Closes"

November 24, 2013

Luke 23:33-43

33 And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. 34 And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. 35 And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, 37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." 39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It is the holiday time of year. We can truly feel it and see it everywhere. Chad and I have been getting our supplies and are making sure everything is ready. We even have our plans for the Friday after Thanksgiving... probably a little, okay a lot, of shopping. Some time helping here to get the Church ready for Christmas (that would be from 8:30am on!) and maybe even on Saturday we will make it to the tree farm to get our tree! We are excited! We are anticipating the holiday season and I have always loved this last Sunday that kicks off that time. It is the last Sunday before Advent, that final countdown sort of Day that means Thanksgiving is the next big event and then we can get to Christmas. I mean Christmas is the season is it not? We have an entire month or more to celebrate our Savior Jesus Christ's birth. We have an entire month to prepare and get ready and set things up do we not?

Well, I do not know if a month seems long enough as I look around me and as I run errands around town. See the stores already have Christmas decorations up, and are running Holiday sales. Black Friday is no longer on that Friday the sales have already begun or begin on Thanksgiving, each year it begins earlier and earlier. Radio stations are already playing Christmas carols twenty four seven. I have to confess that I am already done with most of my family Christmas shopping and only have a few things left to get or purchase. Most of us have set our holiday plans and are just waiting, anticipating the Friday after Thanksgiving so we can do and enjoy the entire month of December.

I mean we have been waiting for this Sunday a long time have we not? Our church year is cyclical, we go from Advent, to Jesus' early life and ministry, to Lent, to Easter, to Pentecost, to what is now finally wrapping up twenty seven long weeks of ordinary time. Time where we just hear the same old ordinary things about Jesus' life and ministry. Time where we move through the stories we have already heard waiting for the good parts that come out at those holidays like Easter and Christmas.

But then can we really take the time to breathe and really pay attention to our holidays. There is a reason why I have got most of our Christmas shopping done, it can be a hassle to go to the stores during the holiday rush, everyone searching for that perfect deal, the newest and the best thing. We sometimes get so caught up in all of the Christmas hoopla that we do not recognize the significance of this particular Sunday.

This particular Sunday is called Christ the King, Reign of Christ Sunday. It is a celebration of the life of Jesus Christ, his entire purpose here on this earth. He was here to be born, to live, to die, and then ascend to be with God.

We talk about Christmas as the season of good will towards all but is that not the call of Christ to all of us at all points throughout the year? We talk about Lent and Easter as the season of repentance for ourselves. Yet here we are in ordinary times wrapping it all up with a passage that extols God to forgive us because we do not know what we are doing.

Have we ever stopped to think about what does it mean to forgive? Time and time again in Jesus' ministry he asks people to forgive one another, to open up their eyes and see each other without judgment or bias. To look into the eyes of another and be able to forgive them their sins as they have sinned against us. And here at the end of his life Jesus again asks for forgiveness, he is not extolling us to forgive but rather asking for us to be forgiven.

We are constantly going, going, going, anticipating the next big event and sometimes in our anticipation we forget to be thankful for what we have right in front of us, the unquestionable mercy of God who has forgiven us for all that we have done, are doing, and will do. This is a radical way of looking at forgiveness. In our passage today Jesus has accepted that he is being and will be hurt by others but he has already forgiven them for their wrong against him. He is also on top of his own forgiveness asking for God's forgiveness for us who do not know what we are doing to him. This concept is a difficult aspect to forgiveness. We can not be held accountable for others actions against us we are only held accountable to ourselves and to God in how we react to those actions. We can only be held accountable to ourselves and to God for our own actions. One of those actions is to forgive others, and to also forgive ourselves for whatever we hold against others for their actions towards us.

People often do not know what they are doing. The world is not cut into straight lines and pathways. What can be offensive to one is not to another. Words however nicely meant can unintentionally hurt and cause grief. Jesus recognized that the people did not know and forgave them for their ignorance.

We can not help that we anticipate and get excited over what is to come, we are human after all. There is so much in life to look forward too. It is almost thanksgiving, a time that reminds us to be thankful. A time that reminds us to count our blessings, and to lift praise and thanks to God for where we are and what we are anticipating. It is also a time to be thankful for the life of Christ given for us and the merciful forgiveness of God who forgives us even when we know not what we do. There is a lot for which to be thankful. Amen.